

PROJECTS

This department welcomes brief notes and article-length manuscripts. The former may include announcements of contemplated or ongoing projects, information on doctoral theses in progress or completed (writer, title, institution, supervisor, and available information on completion time), proposals and questions, and requests for assistance. Announcements of individual research projects, including theses are very important to avoid awkward and wasteful duplication of effort. Articles will ordinarily describe projected, in progress, or completed large-scale projects involving one or several scholars and should follow the same standards as other articles.

TOWARDS A BIOGRAPHY OF JAMES MILLS PEIRCE

Hubert Kennedy

Providence College, Providence, RI 02918

If there is truth in the saying that "the life of a scholar is his works" (as asserted, for example, by F. G. Tricomi [1967, vii]), there still remain two tasks facing the biographer: (1) to identify the subject's works and (2) to place them in historical context. This note is a result of the first of these tasks and is intended as part of a larger project. The list of publications of James Mills Peirce presented here is believed to be nearly complete; the annotations are intended more to identify the content of the publications than to place them historically. The author welcomes any correspondence regarding this project.

James Mills Peirce (1834-1906) was the first of the five children of Sarah Hunt (Mills) Peirce and Benjamin Peirce (1809-1880), Perkins Professor of Astronomy and Mathematics at Harvard University. Their second child was Charles Saunders Peirce (1839-1914), the noted philosopher and logician who is increasingly becoming known as a mathematician (see, for example, [Eisele 1976]). C. S. Peirce was especially trained as a scientist, but it was J. M. Peirce who followed in their father's footsteps, teaching mathematics at Harvard University for almost 50 years.

After graduating from Harvard College in 1853, Peirce attended the Law School for a year. Then in 1854 he and his former classmate (and later President of Harvard University) Charles W. Eliot were appointed Tutors in Mathematics, positions they held until 1858, when Eliot became Assistant Professor of Mathematics and Chemistry. Peirce, who had entered the Divinity School in 1857, resigned as tutor to become a proctor, a position he held until 1861. He graduated from the Divinity School in 1859 and preached in various churches in

and around Boston--and briefly in Charleston, South Carolina--but in 1861, when Eliot gave up the mathematical half of his assistant professorship to take charge of the chemical laboratories of the Lawrence Scientific School, Peirce accepted an appointment as Assistant Professor of Mathematics. He was promoted to University Professor of Mathematics in 1869, and to Perkins Professor of Astronomy and Mathematics in 1885.

After C. W. Eliot was appointed President of Harvard University in 1869, following 4 years as Professor of Chemistry at the newly founded Massachusetts Institute of Technology, he soon involved Peirce in administrative duties. Peirce was executive head of the Graduate Department from its organization in 1872, through its reorganization as the Graduate School in 1890 (when Peirce was named Dean), until 1895, when he resigned to become Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, a post he held until 1898.

As a creative mathematician, J. M. Peirce has been overshadowed by his father Benjamin Peirce and his brother C. S. Peirce, but he enjoyed a reputation as an able administrator and an excellent teacher. He traveled widely and had many interests; he was respected by all and loved by a few intimates. The following brief but varied list of his publications can only give a glimpse into the life of the man who was described by a former classmate as "a very interesting character." (The best available biographical sketches of J. M. Peirce are [Byerly 1906, Rantoul 1913, and Whittemore 1906].)

PUBLICATIONS OF JAMES MILLS PEIRCE

1856

The Character and Philosophy of Malebranche *Monthly Religious Magazine* 15, 373-399

This was written in 1854, when it won the Bowdoin Prize for a Resident Graduate. J. M. Peirce was at that time a student in the Harvard Law School.

This article is an excellent analysis of the philosophy of Malebranche, seen as a development of that of Descartes.

1857

A Text-Book of Analytic Geometry; on the Basis of Professor Peirce's Treatise, Cambridge, Mass. (John Bartlett) vii, 228 pp. + 6 plates

Peirce's textbook, the result of his 4 years spent as a tutor in mathematics at Harvard College from 1854 to 1858, was based on his father's text, although the treatment is much more detailed.